

The Toni Times

From the Desk of Councilmember Toni Atkins



Looking Back and Charging Forward

Council District Three - A Year in Review

by COUNCILMEMBER TONI ATKINS

Last year was a challenging yet ultimately rewarding first year in office. A new mayor and six new councilmembers helped re-energize our city government with fresh ideas and a renewed commitment to move previously stalled efforts forward. It's an exciting time for San Diego, and especially for Council District Three.

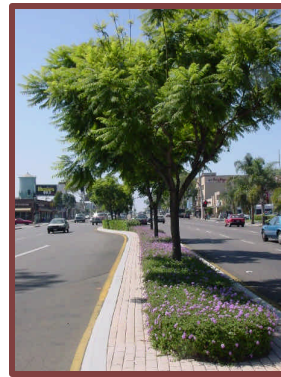
For more than a year and a half prior to being sworn in, I walked door to door speaking with constituents about what they felt the top priorities should be for the incoming councilmember. From these conversations I put together a list of my top priorities for 2001 and beyond.

The one thing I heard most often from voters while campaigning was the need for greater attention to the ailing infrastructure in the Mid-City neighborhoods. It should come as no surprise, then, that many of the goals for the district focus on streets, sidewalks, and other capital improvement projects in our district.

Infrastructure

Finding funds for infrastructure projects was at the top of my "to do" list when I took office. During last year's budget hearings I was successful in lobbying the Mayor and Council to secure an additional \$400,000 for each district to be earmarked for street, sidewalk and general infrastructure improvements in the district. Some of the improvements I chose to fund include portions of the El Cajon Boulevard Median Project from Texas Street to 30th Street, improvements to the intersection of 28th Street and Redwood Street, the

Pershing Portal Project at the gateway to North Park at 28th Street and Upas Street, and the Euclid Avenue revitalization project.



The District Three commitment to infrastructure includes funding for projects that include extension of the El Cajon Boulevard medians (left) and continued funding for new sidewalks throughout the district.

The final budget also provided for enhancements to local library services, with extended hours being added to the Kensington branch and, North Park as well, after I pushed hard for its inclusion even though the City Manager didn't recommend increased hours there. There was also a major increase in the book budget for all branches in the district.

Infrastructure maintenance and community enhancement also figured prominently in my Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) priorities. Of the \$1.47 million in CDBG bricks and mortar funds that I had discretion over during this annual funding cycle, I earmarked \$909,500 (62 percent) for infrastructure, community development, capital improvement projects and business enhancement.

Not included in the \$1.47 million is the \$562,937 of Council District Three CDBG funds continues to go

specifically for the City Heights Urban Village and the Mid-City Police Substation. I remain committed to supporting these projects through repayment of the Section 108 federal loans which helped finance them.

I am proud that I was able to direct \$125,000 to District Three's unique 75/25 sidewalk program which helps citizens replace deteriorating sidewalks in front of their homes. The program reduces the homeowner's share of the cost of sidewalk repair by 75 percent when the work is completed by City contractors. Other infrastructure projects in the district were funded, including \$70,000 for code enforcement, \$26,500 for mid-block streetlights, \$15,000 for tree plantings, \$7,000 for graffiti paintouts, and \$17,000 for library renovations and expansion.

Funds were also allocated for several district capital improvement projects, including the El Cajon Boulevard Median Project, the Euclid Avenue Revitalization Project, the Mid-City Transit Interchange Project, the Park Boulevard Median Project, the Historic Talmadge Gate Restoration project, the Hillcrest streetscape project, Shirley Ann Place Historical Streetlights Project, the Kensington/Talmadge library expansion, the Switzer Canyon/30th Street Bridge Enhancement Plan, as well as minor improvements to the Vermont Street Bridge and funds for the Azalea Park Neighborhood Identification Project and the Altadena Neighborhood Association's Thorn Street Median Project. I also allocated funds to begin a revolutionary pothole repair program in conjunction with the San Diego Labor Council.

In conjunction with the infrastructure fund improvements, Council District Three also received city-wide funds for improvements specifically for the district. The funds contributed to 59 streets or 4.12 miles of resurfacing and 44 streets equivalent to 4.03 miles for slurry sealing. The district was also able to have 68 sites on this year's sidewalk contract with an estimated value of \$310,000. Finally, the district had over 12 sewer and water group jobs completed or in construction totaling over \$18 million of improvements. These group jobs will move us a long way toward replacing the old sewer and water mains in the district. I am happy to report that Phase I of the undergrounding of utility lines along 30th Street south of University Avenue to Laurel Street are

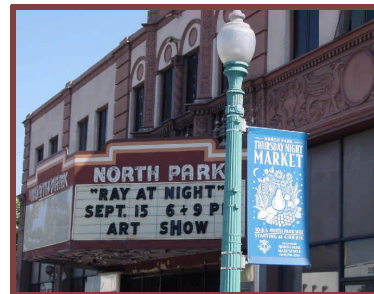
underway and ahead of schedule. The distribution lines are almost completely finished, and the undergrounding of the transmission lines will begin in March. Phase I should be completed by early 2003.

Additionally, plans are underway for the rehabilitation of the Georgia Street Bridge. I am committed to retrofit or replace the bridge, with a tentative completion date of August 2005. In the meantime, interim repairs are underway to the northern wall of bridge which has experienced severe and rather visible damage to its facade.

Redevelopment

Exciting redevelopment projects continue to move forward in our two redevelopment zones, North Park and City Heights. My gratitude goes out to the citizens who serve diligently on the Project Area Committee boards in these two areas, as well as to City Redevelopment and Planning Department staff who continue to push for quality projects in these areas.

We are less than a month away from finalizing an agreement to develop the long-dormant North Park Theater. Bud Fischer, the project's developer, has worked side-by-side with the San Diego Comic Opera, who have been selected to be the primary tenants in the theater. They in turn have identified over 20 per-



The revitalization of the North Park Theater remains one of Councilmember Atkins' top priorities for the district.

forming arts organizations interested in presenting productions at the theater once it is reopened. Part and parcel of the theater project is the City's commitment to build a public parking structure behind the Union Bank property

at 30th and North Park Way which will serve not only the theater but the surrounding business district. Re-

vitalizing the North Park Theater was one of the top priorities as I took office, and I am hopeful we will be open for live performances in early 2004.

At the site of the former Aztec Bowl and former Gustafson Furniture store at 30th Street and El Cajon Boulevard, we are developing an exciting mixed-use, Smart Growth project with Carter/Reese Associates that will include a mix of residential, commercial, community facilities and parking. The 2.5 acre site will include approximately 14 affordable town homes, 16 rental loft homes, 90 affordable senior apartments, and 24 for-sale court homes. The existing North Park Adult Center and associated senior facilities at Oregon and Howard streets could be moved to a new location at this project site, which would create more green space at North Park Community Park and offer the community more modern and spacious community space at a vibrant, new location. Construction is set to begin in early 2003.

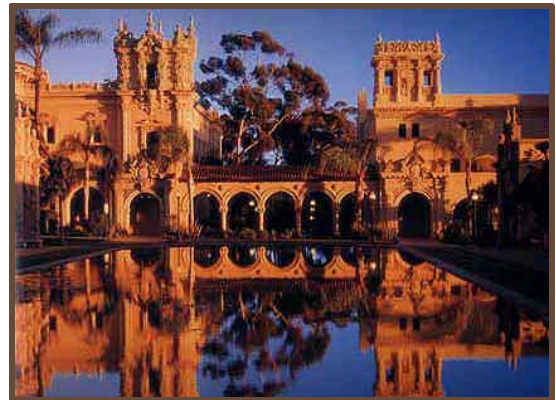
The mixed-use Urban Village Townhomes and Office Space Project in City Heights represents the next phase in the award-winning City Heights Urban Village. The project will provide 116 new townhomes, 75,000 square feet of office space and a 160,000 square foot parking structure. Located at the corner of Fairmount and University Avenues, the project, developed by Price Charities, will continue to drive the revitalization of City Heights. The project provides much needed townhomes for larger families in the area and will add critical office space to the community. As City Heights continues to grow, this project will serve as an example of the type of development that is needed and wanted in Mid-City.

In November, City Heights also celebrated the official grand opening of the Urban Village Retail Center. This 112,000 square foot retail center houses 14 tenants and is anchored by one of the county's largest Albertsons. The retail center provides the residents of City Heights with a wide variety of quality retail choices, and is a cornerstone of the area's economic revitalization. I look forward to building on this tremendous foundation.

Balboa Park

This past year was an important one for Balboa Park. Interest in the park seems to have reached new heights as the public continues to look to Balboa Park as a primary cultural and recreational outlet.

As the jewel of our city and a major source of pride in my district, meeting the needs of Balboa Park has also been a top priority for me. I have stated three major goals for Balboa Park, namely to revise the park's governance structure, begin the process to update necessary park planning documents and finally, to create a permanent funding stream to implement park improvements and take care of deferred maintenance.



Councilmember Atkins lead the move to restructure the way Balboa Park is governed.

I am proud to announce that the first goal has been accomplished with the newly restructured Balboa Park Committee being confirmed by the City Council on January 8, 2002. This committee is representative of the park's stakeholders, and includes designated representatives from the surrounding communities of Golden Hill, North Park and Uptown, as well as from the cultural institutions and user groups. It also includes at-large members to represent the regional interests of the park. The committee will make recommendations on proposed projects in the park, and will also oversee any necessary updates to current park planning documents. As for a permanent funding stream for Balboa Park, I will continue to work with my colleagues on the Council during budget deliber-

ations to find resources to improve this wonderful regional resource. Rest assured I take every opportunity during City Council meetings to solicit their support.

Petitions are currently being circulated to place an initiative on the November 2002 ballot which would amend the City Charter to allocate Mission Bay Park lease revenue back into Mission Bay and other regional parks throughout San Diego. Some of these funds would be spent on deferred maintenance and improvements at Balboa Park institutions.

There were other major developments in Balboa Park in 2001. The Zoo Working Group completed its final report, and the zoo has incorporated many of the recommendations into their latest expansion proposal. The new proposal, entitled "Park Boulevard Promenade," meets a number of the objectives and long-term needs for Balboa Park identified in the Balboa Park Master Plan and the Central Mesa Precise Plan. It will create a much more accessible link between the zoo and the North Prado. It will also increase public open space, beautify the Park Boulevard Corridor, create much-needed public parking that can be conveniently used by patrons of the Prado's cultural institutions as well as zoo patrons. Additionally, it will preserve historic landmarks, create pedestrian plazas, and is contained almost entirely within existing zoo leaseholds. In addition to continuing with the public review process for this proposal, the zoo is currently working with park planners and other city staff to fine-tune the details, and will be coming forward with a financing plan in the coming months.

Parking remains a major challenge in Balboa Park, especially on weekends. The zoo's proposal will add 1,600 new parking spaces, but we need to consolidate parking in the Central Mesa if we are ever to restore the historic gardens and plazas that were removed to make way for parking after the 1935 exposition. This will require replacing several existing lots with a single parking structure in the Central Mesa. As we explore

this long-term goal, I continue to work with San Diego's representatives to the state and federal governments on options for funding.

Toward this end, I was recently pleased to announce a \$975,000 state grant to plan for parking solutions in the Central Mesa. This grant, made possible by Governor Gray Davis and Assemblymember Christine Kehoe, will pay for the appropriate traffic, parking and circulation studies, site selection and public review process, as well as preparation of architectural drawings and construction documents.

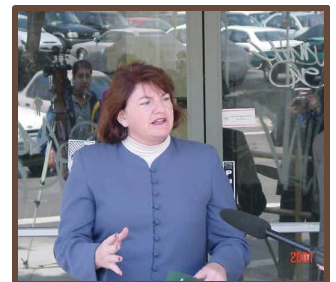
Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee

I was honored to be selected by Mayor Murphy to chair the City's Public Safety and Neighborhood Services (PSNS) Committee last year, and again in the coming year. Chairing the committee gives us the opportunity tackle issues crucial to our older, urban communities, especially those which deal with infrastructure.

This past year the committee:

- Drafted a new "Economic Development Strategy" for the City, which will direct incentives for investment into our older urban communities. This represents a shift away from the strategy of the past decade, which was entirely focused on nurturing the high tech industry in the northern region of the city.
- Banned glass-etching products used to commit acts of graffiti.

As Chair of the Public Safety and Neighborhood Services Committee, Councilmember Atkins helped ban glass-etching products used to commit acts of graffiti, like the markings shown on the right.



- Amended the City Council Policy regarding Business Improvement District formation and expansion to clarify the process.
- Created a new, high-level Small Business Ombudsperson/Advocate position in the Office of Small Business.
- Drafted a new ordinance requiring construction firms who make utility markings on our streets and sidewalks to remove them within 60 days of completion of the project.
- Pursuant to the wishes of California voters as expressed in Proposition 215, created a citizens' task force to make recommendations to the City Council regarding medical cannabis.
- Began the update of our 20-year-old School Pedestrian Safety Policies and Procedures to reflect more current knowledge about traffic engineering, traffic calming, and school design.
- Drafted changes to the Municipal Code regarding the posting and removal of campaign signs, creating a new requirement that signs be removed in a timely manner.

Libraries

Expansion of our branch library system continues to be a concern to constituents citywide, and significant progress was made last year with regard to branch libraries in Council District Three.

Initial designs for the Mission Hills library, which is proposed to be located in Hillcrest, have been submitted. The library is tentatively sited adjacent to Florence Elementary School.

We are working with the community and city staff to explore the possibility of renovating the historic Teachers Training Annex on the San Diego Unified School District Education Center Complex building to

include the University Heights Branch Library. This is in the preliminary stages and I will continue to work with the University Heights community to explore this dream.

The North Park Branch Library has been placed on the preliminary list for Proposition 14 applications. If Council follow's the Natural Resources and Culture Committee's recommendation to include the North Park branch, a comprehensive application will be submitted next year for state funding for this branch. I've been working with the community to build consensus about the size, scope and location of this potential project.

And lastly, I was happy to allocate \$10,000 in District Three infrastructure funds to the Ken/Tal Branch Library for their future expansion plans.



Infrastructure funds were allocated for the future expansion of the Ken/Tal Branch Library.

I-15 Corridor

The grand opening for the first park associated with the I-15 freeway project is set to occur on January 19th. Park de la Cruz provides much-needed open space and recreational opportunities for the residents of City Heights. Area residents will be able to enjoy a new baseball field, new viewing bleachers, paved walking paths, picnic areas and passive park space. The grand opening of the park marks this area's most significant development of park space in the last five years.

Teralta Park is the second park that will come on line as a result of the I-15 interstate project. Scheduled to open in early 2002, Teralta Park is one of the more unique parks in the state of California. Constructed as a "cut and cover" park, this five-acre park is located on the deck of the structure over Interstate 15. Amenities

offered at the park include a large children's play area, half basketball courts, paved walkways and a landscaped passive picnic area for people to enjoy. The opening of the park will again provide much needed recreational and park space for the residents of City Heights.



The five-acre, "cut-and-cover" Teralta Park, one of three parks gained as part of the I-15 freeway project, will bring much-needed open space to Mid-City.

In keeping with recommendations regarding job and career opportunities that came out of the watershed City Heights Economic and Crime Summit in 1993, we also began development of the Workforce Partnership Metro Career Center in City Heights at University Avenue and I-15. The center will provide a one-stop shop for any citizen who wants to advance in the workplace, whether unemployed or simply seeing enhanced skills. It will include a resource center with computer and other technical support to produce resumes, and a Head Start child-care center on site for program participants. Groundbreaking will take place this year and the facility should be open in November 2003.

Housing

In November, I went to Washington, DC, and met with Housing and Urban Development (HUD) personnel to discuss ways to locate resources to deal with the ongoing crisis the General Administration Services (GSA) have created downtown with the removal of three downtown hotels that house 398 Single Room Occupancy (SRO) units. The loss of the units is occurring due to the GSA's planned expansion of the Federal Court House. My position continues to be that this is unacceptable. I went to Washington because our federal government needs to know that the City of San Diego will not stand by and allow for precious housing

units to be eliminated without a plan in place for their replacement. I am hoping to encourage our Congressional delegation to take up this issue so that together we can make a strong, united stand for housing in San Diego. It's not easy fighting the federal government, but I'll continue pushing for more affordable housing units in San Diego.

Toward this goal, I am pushing for the City to declare a Housing State of Emergency. I believe this is a crucial first step in resolving the housing crisis in our City. I have asked the Land Use and Housing Committee to review this item in the hope that it will be brought to the full council for consideration. Along with this request I listed seven steps that the council should take in order to ease the housing crisis:

1. Support an adoption of a reasonable, balanced inclusionary housing policy for the City;
2. Call for the federal government to replace the 398 Single Resident Occupancy (SRO) units being demolished to make way for the new federal courthouse;
3. Require an Affordable Housing Impact Statement to all Manager's Reports on Development Services projects;
4. Create a specific Federal and State Housing Legislative Agenda to be approved by the City Council—something which the City of San Diego has never had before;
5. Require a monthly report updating the Council on the number of housing units approved for development and the number of units approved for demolition broken down by community;
6. Require that with each Affordable Housing Impact Statement that an analysis indicating how the density of the proposed projects relates to the density outlined in the community plan; and

7. Develop a strategic plan outlining how the City's agencies, including the San Diego Housing Commission, Centre City Development Corporation and the Redevelopment Agency, intend to work collaboratively to compete for completion of state tax credits.

Additionally, the development of the Hollywood Palms affordable housing project in City Heights was one of our most important accomplishments. In February of last year, residents of City Heights voiced their concerns and opposition for the ill-conceived and badly designed housing project located at Home and Fairmount avenues. To our advantage, the project's initial funding fell through, affording the community the opportunity to improve the development. In partnership with my office, a Joint Oversight Committee was developed with members of the community and the chairs of both the Project Area Committee and Area Planning Committee. The committee has worked tirelessly for almost a year to redesign and improve the project. The result is a 94-unit affordable housing project, locally managed by the City Heights Community Development Corporation, that will provide quality affordable housing to the residents of San Diego beginning in April of this year.



Hollywood Palms Apartments will bring 94 new affordable rental units to City Heights at the northwest corner of Home and Fairmount Avenues.

City of Villages

I was honored to be asked by the Mayor to be his partner in implementing goal #3 in his "Top 10 Goals for San Diego": "Creating Neighborhoods We Can Be Proud Of." To achieve this goal, and to guarantee the success of the City of Villages, the Mayor and I are co-chairing the Smart Growth Implementation Committee. The committee is a selection of local leaders from the

Unified School District, labor, the building industry, SDSU, the Metropolitan Transit Development Board (MTDB), San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), and City departments such as Redevelopment, Center City Development Corporation (CCDC), and the Housing Commission, that will be critical to the plan's success. The goal of the committee is to identify obstacles to the implementation of smart growth principles in our communities, and propose solutions, whether regulatory, financial or within our various bureaucracies. The committee will be instrumental in coordinating the Transit First efforts of MTDB and the City of Villages Strategy--both of which have the potential to bring tremendous quality of life improvements to our older urban communities.



Councilmember Atkins has been appointed by Mayor Murphy to help achieve his Goal #3 for the City: "Creating Neighborhoods We Can Be Proud Of." She'll co-chair the Smart Growth Implementation Committee with the Mayor.

Looking To the Future

It's amazing what we've been able to accomplish working together with the community toward a common goal. So much of what I do as your representative is dictated by the priorities you've set. I look forward to working with you in the years ahead as we continue to revitalize our neighborhoods, rebuild our streets and sidewalks, create more and higher quality affordable housing units, strengthen our small businesses, and, to borrow from one of the Mayor's favorite catchphrases, create communities we can be proud of. If you have any issues in your neighborhood that I can help you with, please call me at 619/236-6633, or email me at ToniAtkins@sandiego.gov.